

Statement of
The Honorable Michael M. Honda
Member of Congress

Committee on Veterans' Affairs
U.S. House of Representatives

Hearing on
Equity for Filipino Veterans of World War II
Thursday, February 15, 2007

Chairman Filner, Ranking Member Buyer, and Members of the Committee, thank you for holding this critically important hearing concerning the injustice done to some of the bravest men to have fought on behalf of the United States, the Filipino WWII veterans. Mr. Chairman, I also commend you for your tireless leadership on efforts to rectify this situation and for reintroducing H.R. 760, the Filipino Veterans Equity Act.

As members of the Committee know, I have been a vocal advocate for the equitable treatment of Filipino WWII veterans. I consider the rescission of U.S. military status from approximately 250,000 Filipino WWII veterans who fought under U.S. command as one of the greatest injustices ever perpetrated by the Congress. After six decades of disgrace, we have the responsibility to correct this injustice and honor their service and sacrifice, and our window of opportunity to make these brave veterans whole is rapidly closing.

In 1934, when the Philippine Islands were a U.S. territory, Congress enacted Public Law 73-127 requiring the Commonwealth Army of the Philippines to respond to the call of the U.S. President. On July 26, 1941, with the nation facing the threat of Japanese aggression in the Pacific, that call to arms came when President Franklin Roosevelt signed a military order for the Commonwealth Army to serve with the U.S. Army Forces – Far East (USAFFE), under the command of U.S. military leaders. These Filipino soldiers bravely fought along side their American brothers in arms until the end of WWII.

With the enactment of P.L. 79-190 in 1945, Congress recruited an additional 50,000 Filipino soldiers, known as the New Philippine Scouts, in anticipation of needing occupation forces for captured enemy territories. At the time of recruitment, the U.S. government promised that all that responded to the call would be treated as U.S. veterans for the purposes of their benefits.

In 1946, just after the conclusion of the war, Congress rescinded this promise, turning their backs only on the brave Filipino veterans. When passing the First and Second Supplemental Surplus Appropriations Rescission Acts, commonly referred as the Rescission Acts, Congress sought to reduce the amount of previously appropriated funds

devoted to the war effort. Within these bills, however, contained specific provisions that declared that service by the members of the Commonwealth Army and the New Philippine Scouts should not be deemed to have been service in the U.S. military, effectively stripping the Filipino soldiers of their U.S. veteran status.

Although President Harry Truman signed both Rescission Acts into law, he recognized the heroic contributions of the Filipino soldiers and requested that efforts be made to correct the injustice:

“The passage and approval of this legislation do not release the United States from its moral obligation to provide for the heroic Philippine veterans who sacrificed so much for the common cause during the war.”

Since 1946, piecemeal benefits have been hard-won by the Filipino WWII veterans. However, full veteran benefits are still denied. To correct the injustice, I have been a steadfast supporter of the Filipino Veterans Equity Act, which would provide the full benefits promised to all Filipino veterans who fought under U.S. command during WWII. I am encouraged by the Chairman’s dedication to facilitating quick passage of this legislation and the large number of Members participating in this hearing.

As Chairman of the Congressional Asian Pacific American Caucus, I can also voice the Caucus’s united support on this concern. We have prioritized the plight of the Filipino WWII veterans as a top legislative goal. CAPAC will continue to work to educate and recruit support from our colleagues and the public.

Other Members may cite the cost of the Filipino Veterans Equity Act as an obstacle, but who among us can refute the injustice that has been done? Congress must return the promised veteran status to the courageous WWII Filipino soldiers. During the war, there were nearly 250,000 Filipino soldiers who had served under U.S. command. At this point, only an estimated 22,000 are still living. To put things in perspective, the funding necessary to provide these remaining Filipino veterans with full equity of benefits is roughly equal to what we are currently spending in one or two days in Iraq. Must we wait for more of these deserved Filipinos to pass away to justify the cost? Is this how we should repay our courageous veterans?

Mr. Chairman, these WWII heroes are in the twilight of their lives, and time is running out for Congress to recognize their service. A promise made should be a promise kept, especially when it comes to veterans. If we are to be a legislative body dedicated to the ideals of justice and dignity, then it is imperative we honor the promise made to our Filipino veterans, and restore their benefits.

Thank you.